

## **Strikes and the gender question: a panorama of the work stoppages motivated by questions related to women between 1983 and 2011**

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### **Resumo:**

Este trabalho analisa as greves que envolvem questões relativas ao trabalho da mulher presentes no Sistema de Acompanhamento de Greves (SAG) do DIEESE. Foram selecionadas as greves motivadas por temas de interesse da mulher trabalhadora, quer seja reivindicando ou procurando expandir direitos, quer seja protestando ou defendendo condições já adquiridas, além das paralisações com expressiva participação de mulheres. A descrição das greves estudadas permitiu uma análise qualitativa das mobilizações a partir de um rol de temas agrupados por Equidade de Condições, Relações de Trabalho, Gestação e Cuidados com os Filhos(as). Os dados também foram analisados quantitativamente tomando-se por base os setores econômicos, as regiões geográficas e a distribuição dos movimentos grevistas no período de 1983 a 2011.

**Palavras-chave:** Greves, Gênero, Mulher, Brasil

### **Abstract:**

This article analyses workers' strikes registered in the System of Strike Monitoring (Sistema de Acompanhamento de Greves – SAG), maintained by DIEESE – the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies – motivated by questions related to women workers. Within the strikes selected for the article, different motives were identified such as whether they were demands for an extension of rights or protests around the maintenance of acquired rights. Strikes that had a significant participation of women workers were also included. The description of the strikes that were registered in the system allowed qualitative analyses of the data according to classification by themes such as equity of conditions, labor relations, pregnancy, and childcare. The data was also analyzed quantitatively based on economic sectors, geographical regions and the distribution of the strike movement between 1983 and 2001.

**Keywords:** Strikes, Gender, Women, Brazil

## **1. Introduction**

The strike is an important instrument of working-class pressure and a relevant indicator of union action. Diverse aspects of collective negotiations, working conditions and the organization of workers in determined historical moments may be analyzed through strike actions. Even though strikes in Brazil have been studied under diverse perspectives, there are no specific studies of striking women workers or questions related to gender in the workplace in strike movements.

In 1998, DIESSE – the Brazilian-based Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies – created the System of Strike Monitoring (SAG-DIESSE). It is a computerized system that has registered more than 27 thousand strikes with the objective of analyzing tendencies in strike movements. It has registered strikes from 1983 onwards, but in 2010 also incorporated the database of the Nucleus of Studies of Public Politics (NEPP) at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), allowing it to include strikes as far back as 1978. It is the sole database on strikes in Brazil.

Using the SAG-DIESSE database, this article aims to investigate the frequency of questions related to gender in strike movements and how such issues were treated, reflecting on the role of women and their relationship to national strike movements.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study was developed through the very SAG-DIESSE database, allowing us to select strikes that we analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. We coined the term “women’s strike” to refer to such job actions, based on three criteria related to the causes and nature of the strikes which we will outline further in this article.

The SAG-DIESSE database is a structured database that registers diverse variables related to strikes such as place, period, occupation, and companies or government organs involved as well as a register of causes, principal events and results. Our study considered 165 possible reasons for work stoppages with each strike possibly involving more than one cause. Some examples were delay of salary, health conditions, sanitary conditions, length of the workday, maintenance of job categories and issues related to transportation to and from work. We organized these causes in the following groups: working conditions, politics, salary and remuneration, relations in the workplace and relations in the union. Thus, there was initially no group specifically dedicated to questions related to women workers.

### **2.1 First Selection**

We analyzed the 165 possible causes of strikes, searching for those related to women’s questions, that is, mobilizations related to improving or maintaining women’s situation in the workplace. To assist in this endeavor, we utilized as a reference an International Labor Organization (ILO) study entitled “Collective Negotiation of Work

and Gender and Race Equity in Brazil (OIT, 2011), elaborated by DIESSE through a technical cooperation agreement between the ILO in Brazil and the Special Secretary for Women's Policies (SPM) of the Brazilian federal government. This study defined themes with special reference to women and gender questions based on an analysis of agreements and conventions realized from 2001-2006. Using this reference, we established six specific motives which defined a strike as a "women's strike", that is, if at least one cause of a strike was motivated by one of these motives. These reasons were moral and sexual harassment, childcare, stability of pregnant workers, maternity leave, maternity/childbirth and personal inspection.

a) Sexual harassment

The Brazilian federal law 10.224/2001 (2001) criminalizes sexual harassment, defining it as follows: "To constrain someone with the intent to obtain a sexual favor or advantage, with the agent using their condition of hierarchical or ascendant superiority inherent in the exercise of a job, an occupation or a function". Victims may thus be both women and men. However, according to the study of the Sub-Commission of Gender of the Brazilian Ministry of Work and Employment (MTE, 2009, p.29) "[women] are the greatest victims of what the law determines as sexual harassment". Indeed, the predominance of women victims is especially high according to Mendonça (2001) and Calil (1999). Moreira (2002) shows that "in more than 90% of cases, men harass women".

b) Childcare

According to Brazilian legislation, every company with more than 30 employees with more than 16 years of age should maintain childcare facilities in the workplace or pay a subsidy for the private contracting of childcare for the children of their workers. While such a measure may also benefit the male worker and his children, the number of women who assume the principal role in childcare is still significantly greater than men.

c) Stability of Pregnant Workers

The Federal Constitution, article 10, guarantees such stability, which prohibits the arbitrary firing of a pregnant worker from five months in the pregnancy until after the birth.

d) Maternity Leave

According to the Ministry of Social Assistance, this is a right of women “for reason of giving birth, including stillbirth, non-criminal abortion, adoption or judicial custody for the purpose of adoption”.

e) Childcare/Maternity Aid

This is pecuniary assistance paid on the birth of a child.

f) Personal inspection

Personal bodily inspection is a procedure that may bring constraints especially for women workers.

## **2.2 Second Selection**

An analysis of the causes prescribed by the methodology employed in the SAG-DIEESE database also permitted us to establish a group of motives that, in certain conditions, could indicate a women’s strike. They are: moral harassment by bosses, education, public education, equality of opportunities, salary equality and political participation. To identify a women’s strike from these causes, it is necessary to understand the description of its causes. When a strike is related to the cause of salary equality, for example, it is necessary to analyze the causes of the strike to know if it demands the equality of salaries between men and women or if it regards equality between job classifications since the first case specifically deals with a work stoppage to combat an injustice related to gender. As such, we studied each one of the 2,197 strikes associated to at least one of these causes to identify those that related specifically to women.

## **2.3 Third Selection**

In addition to causes, to locate women's strikes in the SAG-DIEESE database we also analyzed the events of particular strikes as a whole, that is, the group of variables that described a strike's causes, development and results. Therefore, we searched for certain key terms in the database fields such as: abortion, adoption, breastfeeding, breast feeder, companion, child, dependent, discrimination, feminine, son or daughter, employee, gender, gestation, pregnant woman, gynecology, gynecologist, pregnancy, infancy, youth, juvenile, young person, lactation, mother, mammography, maternal, maternity, woman, childbirth, woman in labor and woman worker. The techniques used in this research thus considered a range of possible nominal similarities.

We also found 467 strikes that we individually studied to select those that we considered women's strikes. During this analysis, we detected strikes whose causes were not directly related to women's questions, but referred to participation of women in strike movements. We treated such strikes separately.

## **2.4 Temporal Boundary**

We conducted our research in the database according to the procedures outlined above without any temporal restriction, terminating the study in June 2012. However, some of the strikes that occurred in 2011 and all of those in 2012 were not completely registered in the database so we discarded them from the analysis. Moreover, it was not possible to identify women's strikes before 1983. Strikes between 1978 and 1982 were not originally included in the database, but were only added later from the Nucleus of Studies of Public Politics (NEPP) of UNICAMP. It was thus not possible to know if there were women's strikes in this period or if the methodology used by NEPP would allow us to capture such information. As a result, we only considered strikes that occurred between 1983 and 2010 and some stoppages in 2011.

## **2.5 Procedures**

In sum, we studied those strikes that were contained in the SAG-DIEESE database that were associated with at least one of the six causes in the first selection, at least one of the motives in the second selection selected after analysis, and finally those strikes that were related to women in the third selection. We arrived at a total of 267 women's strikes that we qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. These represented

1% of the total number of 26,375 strikes in the period. The variables that we studied quantitatively were the year of the beginning of the strike, the geographic region and the economic sector.

The sources of the SAG-DIEESE database are unions, the principal newspapers of the country, Internet sites and reports by DIEESE researchers but not all sources report the end of a stoppage or its results. In fact, we do not know the duration or the results of 36% of the strikes studied. To avoid possible distortions in the data analysis, we decided to not study the duration or the outcomes of the strikes.

In studying each strike, we observed that there were indeed demands expressed in relation to gender questions. These would bring more accuracy and refinement to the analysis, but they were not captured in the methodology used by the SAG-DIEESE database. As such, with a focus on women's questions, we classified the selected strikes according to a specific list of themes (see Appendix I). We used this classification for our qualitative analysis.

### **3. The presence of women's strikes in the SAG-DIEESE database**

Table 1 shows the proportion of women's strikes and total strikes year by year. In the last years, women's strikes constituted a larger proportion of the total strikes than in the earlier years.

**Table 1 - Percentage of Women's Strikes in Relation to Total Number of Strikes by Year, Brazil, 1983-2011<sup>1</sup>**

Ano	Greves de mulher		Todas as greves		Greves de mulher sobre o total
	nº	%	nº	%	%
1983	3	1,1%	363	1,4%	0,8%
1984	3	1,1%	641	2,4%	0,5%
1985	13	4,9%	926	3,5%	1,4%
1986	25	9,4%	1589	6,0%	1,6%
1987	16	6,0%	2185	8,3%	0,7%
1988	10	3,7%	2106	8,0%	0,5%
1989	27	10,1%	3927	14,9%	0,7%
1990	14	5,2%	2699	10,2%	0,5%
1991	13	4,9%	1419	5,4%	0,9%
1992	3	1,1%	556	2,1%	0,5%
1993	5	1,9%	643	2,4%	0,8%
1994	7	2,6%	1034	3,9%	0,7%
1995	13	4,9%	1055	4,0%	1,2%
1996	6	2,2%	1228	4,7%	0,5%
1997	6	2,2%	630	2,4%	1,0%
1998	2	0,7%	531	2,0%	0,4%
1999	7	2,6%	506	1,9%	1,4%
2000	10	3,7%	525	2,0%	1,9%
2001	2	0,7%	416	1,6%	0,5%
2002	4	1,5%	297	1,1%	1,3%
2003	1	0,4%	339	1,3%	0,3%
2004	6	2,2%	301	1,1%	2,0%
2005	4	1,5%	299	1,1%	1,3%
2006	10	3,7%	318	1,2%	3,1%
2007	5	1,9%	316	1,2%	1,6%
2008	11	4,1%	410	1,6%	2,7%
2009	13	4,9%	517	2,0%	2,5%
2010	19	7,1%	442	1,7%	4,3%
2011*	9	3,4%	157	0,6%	5,7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>26375</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>1,0%</b>

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

A process of redemocratization and union actions to widen the rights of labor and citizens characterized the Brazilian political conjuncture from the middle of the 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s. This period is included in what Eduardo Noronha calls the first great cycle of strikes in Brazil (1978-1997) that preceded the normalization of the strike movement from 1998 onwards (NORONHA, 2009).

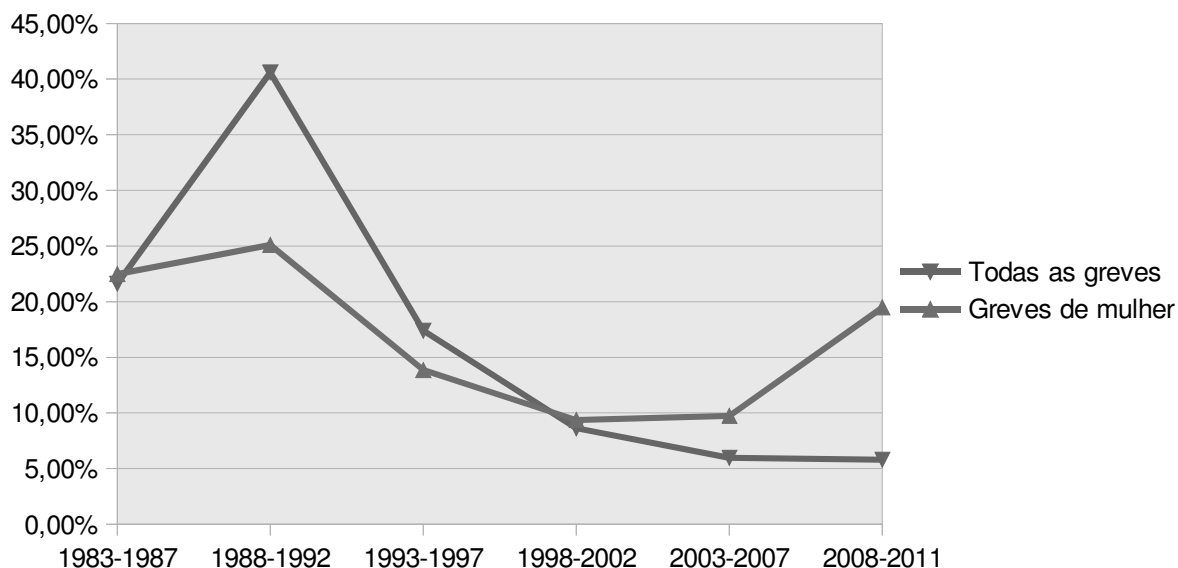
Figure 1 reveals the significant growth of the number of strikes during the 1980s. The number of strikes reached a peak in 1989, when SAG-DIEESE registered

<sup>1</sup>Only some of the strikes in 2011 were included in the database. Since then, many other strikes were included, which would significantly alter the results.

3,927 strikes in the year. During the decennial 1983-1992, the number of women's strikes also increased, but in a more discrete form. In considering all the strikes in the period, we may see that in 1983, strikes constituted 1.4% of the total but increased to 14.9% of the total in 1989. However, the percentage of women's strikes in these years increased also significantly from 1.1% in 1983 to 10.1% in 1989. Although women's strikes showed a similar tendency as the total number of strikes, we may also observe that in the first four periods, between 1983 and 2002, the number of strikes related to women grew while the total number of strikes showed a certain stability. The favorable economic conjuncture in the following period that witnessed an increase in the minimum wage, low unemployment rates and a positive environment for collective negotiations, leading to real wage increases above the National Indicator of Consumer Prices (INPC-IBGE) (DIEESE, 2013), contributed to the fact that strikes maintained a rhythm that Noronha denominates as "normalized". According to him, in this phase strikes reached a dimension similar to that in other democratic countries (NORONHA, 2009, p.164). The growth in the number of women's strikes in the last period (2008-2011) was triggered by Law 11.770/2008 of the federal government that instituted the "Citizen Company Program" that increased maternity leave from 4 to 6 months.



**Figure 1 - Percentage of Women's Strikes and Total Strikes by Five Year Periods 1983-2011, Brazil<sup>2</sup>**



Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

### 3.1 Distribution of Women's Strikes by Economic Sector

As Table 2 shows, the largest percentage of total strikes occurred in the following sectors: industry (43.8%) and services (23.45) followed by state public servants (12.8%) and municipal public servants (11.3%). Considering just women's strikes in Figure 2, the largest percentages were in industry (37.8%), services (28.8%) and state public servants (15.7%). There is a certain symmetry between the proportion of women's strikes and that of the total number of strikes since the more strikes that occurred in a sector the more the chances were to find women's strikes among them. There are sectors in which the proportion of women's strikes is greater than the proportion of the total number of its strikes. This is the case with public servants at the municipal, state and federal levels as well as the rural sector. This does not mean, however, that in these sectors women's questions are more important than other questions since the number of women's strikes is still quite low compared to the total

<sup>2</sup>The last period (2008-2011) was only 4 years in duration.

number. A small variation in the number of women's strikes could significantly change the relation between the proportions.

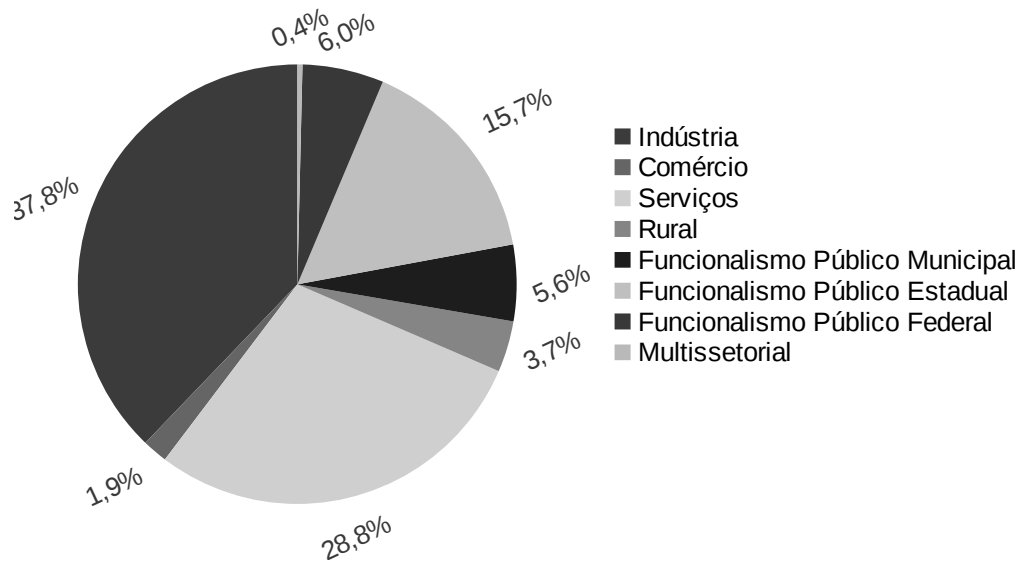
Even though rural workers' strikes represented only 0.8% of all the strikes in the period, the sector saw 3.7% of all strikes related to women's issues. It is worth noting that rural workers only gained equal rights in comparison with urban workers in the 1988 Federal Constitution.

**Table 2 - Distribution of women's strikes and total number of strikes by economic sector, 1983-2011, Brazil**

Setor	Greves de mulher		Todas as greves	
	nº	%	nº	%
Indústria	<b>101</b>	37,8%	11466	43,8%
Comércio	<b>5</b>	1,9%	587	2,2%
Serviços	<b>77</b>	28,8%	6197	23,4%
Rural	<b>10</b>	3,7%	210	0,8%
Funcionalismo Público Municipal	<b>15</b>	5,6%	3008	11,3%
Funcionalismo Público Estadual	<b>42</b>	15,7%	3405	12,8%
Funcionalismo Público Federal	<b>16</b>	6,0%	1170	4,4%
Multissetorial	<b>1</b>	0,4%	138	0,6%
Não identificado	-	-	194	0,8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>26375</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

**Figure 2 - Distribution of the total number of women's strikes by economic sector, 1983-2011, Brazil**



Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

### 3.2

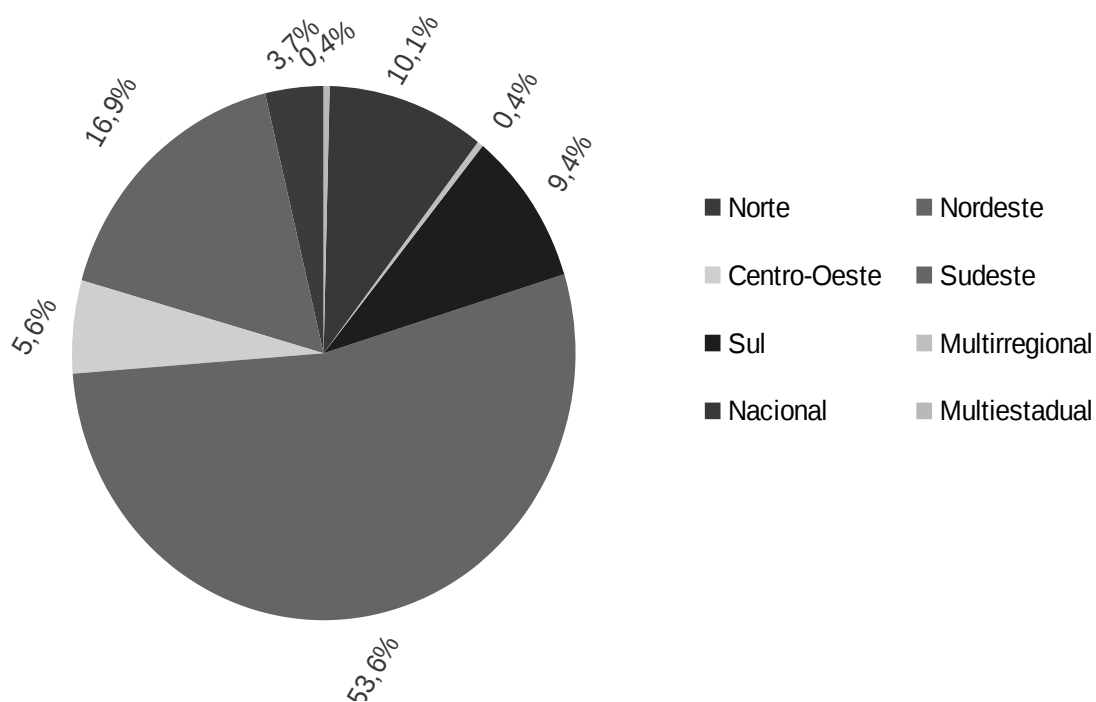
#### Distribution of women's strikes by geographic regions

When we studied the geographical location of women's strikes (Table 3 and Figure 3), we found that the greatest concentration was in the southeast region with 143 strikes, followed by the northeast with 45 cases. There were 27 national strikes that equaled 10.1% of the total of women's strikes. Bank workers were responsible for 25 of the 27 national stoppages.

**Table 3 - Distribution of women's strikes by geographic region, 1983-2011, Brazil<sup>3</sup>**

Região	Greves de mulher		Todas as greves	
	nº	%	nº	%
Norte	10	3,7%	849	3,2%
Nordeste	45	16,9%	3949	15,0%
Centro-Oeste	15	5,6%	1546	5,9%
Sudeste	143	53,6%	16301	61,8%
Sul	25	9,4%	2846	10,8%
Nacional <sup>1</sup>	27	10,1%	729	2,8%
Multirregional <sup>2</sup>	1	0,4%	99	0,4%
Multiestadual <sup>3</sup>	1	0,4%	56	0,2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>26375</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

**Figure 3 - Distribution of women's strikes by geographic region, 1983-2011, Brazil**

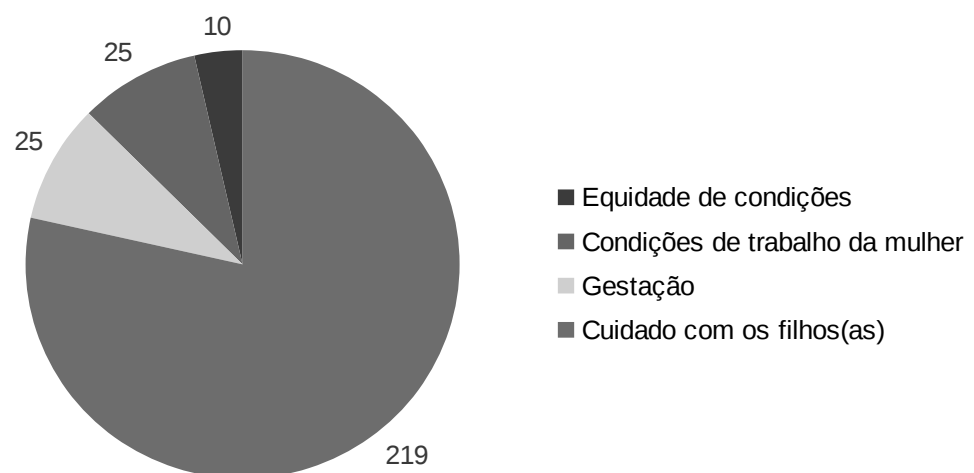
Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

<sup>3</sup>National strike in this context refers to stoppages by nation-wide mobilizations of workers. Multiregional strike is that which occurred in different geographic regions. For example, in the states of the northeast and southeast. Multistate strike is that which occurred in different states in the same geographic region.

#### 4. Discussion of themes in the women's strikes

We identified 27 themes that reflected the interests of women workers in the total of 267 women's strikes, taking into account that a strike may be associated to one or more themes. The themes associated with a women's strike could derive from demands with different purposes. Sometimes a strike occurred for something the workers wanted to win, other times they were provoked by diverse protests and sometimes they involved a right that had already been won (through the law or a collective agreement or convention) that was not being enforced or was under threat of being revoked. We organized these 27 themes in four groups in Appendix 1: Equality of conditions, working conditions of women workers, pregnancy and childcare.

**Figure 4 - Distribution of Themes, 1983-2011, Brazil**



Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

##### 4.1 Equality of conditions

Themes that related to equality of conditions between male and female workers only appeared 10 times in all the strikes analyzed. This small number demonstrates the relative lack of interest shown by strike movements related to this issue despite the unfavorable conditions of women workers in the labor market.

In 2004, workers in the civil construction industry in Anindeua, Barbacena and Belém, in the northern state of Pará, stopped work for 13 days, demanding a: “20%

salary increase; 40% extra for insalubrious conditions of workers on the highest level of the works; *reserve of 10% of job vacancies for women*; incentives for attendance; a free meal; and registered legal status for all workers”(SAG-DIEESE, 2004, our emphasis). This was the only strike we found that demanded a percentage of job vacancies for women. Even though civil construction is a profession dominated by male workers, the participation of women in the sector increased by 58% between 2000-2009 (DIEESE, 2013, p. 88).

With respect to equal salaries for men and women, we discovered four strikes. One was by women workers in a chemical and pharmaceutical industry in Santo André in the state of São Paulo in 1984 who demanded a “37.5% salary increase beginning on September 1, a change in the base calendar date for increases from January 1 to December 1, the formation of a factory commission, stability and *equal pay for men and women who performed the same functions*”(SAG-DIEESE, 1984, our emphasis). The other three strikes were the initiative of rural workers in São Paulo in 1985 who demanded respectively:

an increase in the daily wages from 7,000 to 15,000 *cruzeiros*; an 8-hour day; priority for rural workers from the area; equal pay for men, women and minors; pay for Sunday work, etc.

an increase in the daily salary from 10,000 to 17,000 *cruzeiros*; readmission of 13 union activists fired from the plants; job stability for one year; wage parity for men and women; improvements in medical and hospital services.

increase of 7,000 *cruzeiros* in the daily wage, 8-hour workday, priority for rural workers from the region; equal wages for men, women and minors, paid Sunday work, guarantee of work, inspection of prices in the company stores by the Brazilian National Superintendence of Supply (SUNAB) (SAG-DIEESE, 1985, our emphasis).

We did not discover in the last 28 years strikes motivated by equality of remuneration in occupations in which women are a majority compared to occupations with a majority male workforce even though women workers continue to perceive that they receive lower salaries than men.

There was a strike by rural workers in the state of Paraná in 1987 which was against the “lowering of daily wages from Cz\$120 to Cz\$70 (for men) and Cz\$60 (for women) in the cotton harvest (SAG-DIEESE, 1987). This strike was an attempt to revert a salary disparity perpetrated by the bosses.

A strike by metalworkers in Florianopolis in the southern state of Santa Catarina in 1991 did not demand equity in salaries, but equality in the extra pay for insalubrious work: “ They demanded 15% extra in the wages for October and another 25% in wages for January, *equality of payment for insalubrious conditions to men and women*, extra for night work and payment in accordance with the minimum wage base of the occupation” (SAG-DIEESE, 1991, our emphasis).

There was a strike by metalworkers in Betim in the state of Minas Gerais in 2007 linked to the discrimination suffered by various women workers. The cause of the strike was described as follows:

The workers protested against: the substitution of one older production manager by another, accused of disrespect and discrimination by various women workers; the announcement that the first parcel of the PLR [bonus related to results and profits] would not surpass 55% of nominal salary and in some sectors would not surpass 32%; work on Saturdays until 10:20pm; regularization of Sunday work; different salaries among employees in the same functions; the use of contracted-out workers in the activities of the company; moral harassment; improvement in the concession of the annual gift of a food basket; and payment of a CCT (Collective Convention of Work) bonus for metalworkers in Betim, Igarapé and São Joaquim das Bicas (SAG-DIEESE, 2007, our emphasis).

We may also emphasize two strikes with ample demands for equal rights between men and women and the guarantee of equality. The first was a strike of metalworkers in the state of Santa Catarina in 1987 in which the workers “demanded a salary adjustment of 26%, retroactive to October 1, health plan and the compliance of verbal agreements with the workers, such as wage increases after a period of experience and *the equalization of rights between men and women*” (SAG-DIEESE, 1987, our emphasis). The second was a strike by chemical and pharmaceutical workers in Camaçari and Candeias in the state of Bahia in 2006 in which the workers demanded:

a salary increase of R\$200 (for inflation reposition; renovation of the CCT; overtime pay; changes in shifts; special and pre-retirement possibilities; union representation by the rank and file; ergonomic programs; furnishing of medical exams to the workers; end of restrictions on medical leave with exams by autonomous physicians; stability for injured and/or sick workers; against moral harassment; guarantee of equality of gender (SAG-DIEESE, 2006, our emphasis).

**Table 4 - Distribution of Themes in the Group “Equality of Conditions”, 1983-2011, Brazil**

Equidade de condições	Quinquênios						TOTAL
	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2011	
Cotas para mulheres	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Discriminação por gênero	1	-	-	-	2	-	3
Igualdade de remuneração	5	1	-	-	-	-	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>10</b>

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.  
[Equality of conditions, Quinquênios= Five-Year Periods]

Quotas for Women

Gender Discrimination

Equality of remuneration]

#### 4.2 Working Conditions of Women Workers

The thematic group Working Conditions of Women Workers consists of 11 themes that appear 25 times in women’s strikes. The strikes in this group attempted to win the construction of female accommodations, improvements in the environment of and in conditions of work, a career plan for occupations and salaries, a health plan paid by the company and a preventative policy for moral and sexual harassment. The strikes also involved protests against moral harassment, sexual harassment, delay in salary, punishment of women, personal inspections of women and unsafe working conditions.

Regarding improvements in the work environment and working conditions, we may highlight chemical and pharmaceutical workers in São Bernardo do Campo in the state of São Paulo who in 1985 demanded “extra pay for insalubrious conditions, drinkable water, improvements in the restaurant, elections for the CIPA [Internal Commission for the Prevention of Accidents], a real wage increase of 5%, change in the base calendar date for increases, *that women stop pulling 200kg drums* and the rehiring of 13 fired workers” (SAG-DIEESE, 1985, our emphasis). Another case involved shoe-factory workers in Sapiranga in the state of Rio Grande do Sul who in 1986 demanded “a 50% increase for those who gained up to 1.5 minimum wages, 40% for those who received above this, a salary base of Cz\$ 1.206,00, the return of a lunch hour and *the right of women to work seated*” (SAG-DIEESE, 1985, our emphasis).



A strike by clothing industry workers in Rio de Janeiro in 1989 highlights evidence of inadequate working conditions and personal inspections in this thematic group as well as issues related to pregnant workers in the thematic group Pregnancy. The cause of the strike was described as follows:

Terrible working conditions, humiliating inspections that the women workers were submitted to, the impeding of unionization, lack of a dressing room, the non-acceptance of a proof from the INPS [National Institute for Social Assistance] for medical leave, the non-payment of the occupation minimum wage base, non-remunerated overtime, *obligation of a pregnancy test each 6 months* and salary increase of 100%. (SAG-DIEESE, 1989, our emphasis).

Municipal public servants in Florianópolis raised a quite original demand in a 2006 strike. Among the various demands of the workers, they pressed for “[...] a training course to avoid moral and sexual harassment [...]” (SAG-DIEESE, 2006, our emphasis).

The most frequent theme in the thematic group was punishment of women workers. We discovered this eight times in strikes which protested against the suspension or firing of women workers.

As to health and safety questions in the workplace, public servants of the INSS [National Institute for Social Insurance] in the state of Alagoas in 2000 who protested against the lack of personal security in the occupation of medical inspectors. The causes that provoked the strike were described as follows:

The spark for the strike was *an aggression suffered by a female physician inspector* on 03/04. The employee had removed a worker from social security after denying them a place in the category that generated benefits for personal incapacity. For this occupational category, the presence of a police car in front of the inspection offices was not sufficient to resolve the problem of security. The physicians wanted security guards to be placed inside the inspection offices of the INSS in the capital city and in the interior of the state (SAG-DIEESE, 2000, our emphasis).

**Table5 - Distribution of Themes in the Working Conditions of Women Workers, 1983-2011, Brazil**

Condições de trabalho da mulher	Quinquênios						TOTAL
	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2011	
Alojamento feminino	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Assédio moral	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Assédio sexual	-	-	3	-	-	-	3
Atraso de salário	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Melhores condições de trabalho para mulheres	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
Plano de cargos e salários	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Plano de saúde	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Prevenção de assédio moral e sexual	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Punição de mulheres	4	1	3	-	-	-	8
Revistas femininas	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
Segurança no trabalho	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>

[Working Conditions of Women Workers, Five-Year Periods

Female accommodations

Moral Harassment

Sexual Harassment

Delay of Salary

Better Working Conditions for Women

Career Plan for Occupations and Salaries

Health Plan

Prevention of Moral and Sexual Harassment

Punishment of Women Workers

Personal Inspections of Women Workers

Personal Safety at Work]

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

### 4.3 Pregnancy

The thematic group Pregnancy is composed of six themes that occurred 25 times in women's strikes. These themes deal specifically with the labor relations of pregnant women. The work stoppages in this group protested against the punishment and firing of pregnant workers, the obligation to undergo pregnancy tests and for better working conditions for pregnant workers. They also aimed to win, or amplify, stability for pregnant workers and an increase in paid maternity leave in the case of miscarriages.

In the first five-year period studied, between 1983 and 1987, we found the majority of cases related to the stability of the pregnant worker. There were 10 work stoppages that aimed to win this right or widen it. It is important to note that before the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution, rural workers did not have equal conditions with urban workers whose labor relations were covered under the Consolidated Labor Laws (CLT), yet even these latter workers struggled to widen the period of stability of pregnant workers. In the case of sugar-cane workers in the state of

Paraíba in 1984 the following description explained the reason for a strike: “The strike affected 34 municipalities in the state of Paraíba. They demanded [...] among other things, *stability for pregnant workers*; the maintenance of a table of work tasks, a right won in the past that the bosses wanted to eliminate, and a family salary (SAG-DIEESE, 1984, our emphasis).

The workers’ movement in the food industry in Uberlândia in the state of Minas Gerais in 1986 obtained the following gains:

[...] 10% wage increase, 65% increase in overtime during the week and 100% on Sundays and holidays. Souza Cruz [the company] *promised to extend medical assistance to spouses, increase stability for pregnant workers to 150 days, concede retirement for those with 25 years of service and a transport auxiliary of Cz\$ 45 per month* (SAG-DIEESE, 1986, our emphasis).

As to miscarriages, article 135 of the CLT calls for a paid two-week leave. Workers in the metal industry in Campinas in the state of São Paulo struck in 2011 to increase this paid leave as well as other demands related to women workers. For this reason, this strike was included in the thematic group Childcare. Included among the demands were:

*180 days of maternity leave for mothers who adopted children from 0-5 years of age; child care benefit of 25% of the base salary of the occupational category; 120 days of leave for women who suffered miscarriages (non-criminal); five days of leave for homosexual couples who unite in a stable relationship; three days a year of paid leave for justified accompaniment of children to the doctor; five more days in the latter case if it involves hospital internment and three days a year to participate in school meetings* (SAG-DIEESE, 2011, our emphasis).

**Table 6**  
**Distribution of the themes in the group “Pregnancy”, 1983-2011, Brazil**

Gestação	Quinquênios						TOTAL
	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2011	
Estabilidade gestante	10	3	-	1	-	-	14
Licença-aborto	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Melhores condições de trabalho para gestantes	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Punição de gestantes	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Readmissão gestantes	1	3	1	1	1	-	7
Teste de gravidez	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>

[Pregnancy, Five-Year Periods

Stability of Pregnant Workers  
 Leave for Miscarriages  
 Better Working Conditions for Pregnant Workers  
 Punishment of Pregnant Workers  
 Readmission of Pregnant Workers  
 Pregnancy Tests]

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

#### 4.4 Childcare

The thematic group Childcare includes demands referring to aid conceded to women workers who give birth. The seven themes in this group that occurred 219 times in women's strikes are: aid for absence to accompany children; childcare benefits; maternity and childbirth aid, scholarships for children of workers; childcare at the workplace or that contracted elsewhere; payment of extra benefits during maternity leave and maternity leave itself.

We distinguished childcare benefits from childcare in the workplace or contracted elsewhere since the first is pecuniary and the latter deals with physical space in the company or an arrangement elsewhere to care for children while their parents work. According to the Ministry of Labor and Employment:

Every company who has more than 30 employees of more than 16 years of age is obliged to maintain an appropriate place where workers who are mothers may care for their children during the period of breastfeeding, which goes from birth to six months of age of the baby.

Childcare benefit – or compensation for childcare – *is a value that the company repasses directly to those employed in such a form that they will not be obliged to maintain a childcare in the workplace.* In this case, the benefit must be conceded to all workers who are mothers, independent of the number of employees in the establishment and should be the object of collective negotiation (MTE – Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2008, our emphasis).

Childcare benefit is a theme that occurred 119 times in women's strikes with 52 cases in which this demand was sought, 27 times against employer attempts to reduce or suspend this benefit and 40 times in strikes which aimed to increase the value of the benefit.

Women's strikes over childcare in the workplace or elsewhere occurred 58 times. In 55 of these strikes, the workers aimed to win a right to childcare facilities, in two strikes they demanded improvements in the existing childcare facilities and in the strike of leather workers in Caçador in Santa Catarina in 2009, the strikers protested against the threat of suspension of spaces for workers in the company childcare facility:

[...] On 29/06 the secretary of education of the municipality said that she received a communication from the company *that striking mothers would have their children's spaces in the company childcare facilities suspended*. Despite the fact that the municipality maintained the childcare facility, since the municipality paid for school lunches in the facilities and the labor force of the professionals for this, the Secretary of Education did not interfere in what it considered to be an administrative question of the company (SAG-DIEESE, 2009, our emphasis).

Workers in the private school system in Recife in the state of Pernambuco in 1985 struck to demand a full scholarship for their children and dependents. In 2000, two strikes of workers in private schools, one in Minas Gerais and the other in Paraíba, protested, respectively, against “the end of scholarships for children of teachers (100% in the school in which the parents taught and 50% in other private high schools”); and against the “suspension of rights acquired through the determination of the Superior Labor Court (TST) such as the monthly scholarship for children of teachers” (SAG-DIEESE, 2000).

The number of demands for maternity leave, which reached 23 cases from 2008 to 2011, involved struggles to widen it to 180 days in accordance with Law 11770/2008.

**Table 7**  
**Distribution of Themes in the Group “Childcare”, 1983-2011, Brazil**

Cuidado com os filhos(as)	Quinquênios						TOTAL
	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2011	
Abono de falta para acompanhamento de filho(a)	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Auxílio-creche	4	30	23	16	18	28	119
Auxílio-maternidade/natalidade	-	1	1	-	3	-	5
Bolsa de estudos para filhos	1	-	-	2	-	-	3
Creche	26	22	5	2	1	2	58
Licença-maternidade	2	1	1	-	2	23	29
Pagamento de adicionais/benefícios durante a licença-maternidade	-	-	-	1	3	-	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>219</b>

[Childcare, Five-Year Periods

Bonus for Absence to Accompany Children  
 Childcare Benefit  
 Aid for Childbirth and Maternity  
 Scholarships for Children  
 Childcare Facilities  
 Maternity Leave  
 Payment of Additional Benefits for Maternity Leave]

Source: Elaboration by the authors based on the SAG-DIEESE database.

## 5. Participation of women in strike movements

Another possibility in the analysis of the SAG-DIEESE database deals with the participation of women in strikes movements in general. How are work stoppages among occupations that are majority women? What are their principal demands? Does the expressive participation of women indicate anything specific in their mobilizations? How do these movements advance over time? We may study these and other questions if we consider the sex of the strikers through our analyses.

Even though the present study has not dealt with these questions (since they will be discussed at another opportunity), some strikes deserve to be cited to give us an idea of the possibilities that the SAG-DIEESE database offers with respect to this question. In 1991, after a 9-days of work stoppage, a strike for better salaries by penitentiary agents in Minas Gerais received the adhesion of women workers: “On 14/11, the employees of the women’s prison Estevão Pinto joined the movement (the strike continues) (SAG-DIEESE, 1991).

In a 1995 strike, women workers in the tourism and hospitality sector in São Paulo protested against the delay in salaries: “Women cooks, wait staff and cooks’ helpers participated in the movement for those who provided services to the Mandaqui Hospital in the north zone of São Paulo. On 12/07, the company paid the delayed salaries and the workers returned to their activities” (SAG-DIEESE, 1995).

In 2001, workers in telephone companies in the capital city Brasília struck to receive delayed salaries:

The company provides services to the Metropolitan Department of Urban Transport (DMTU) of Brasília. The 26 strikers attended users of collective transport, receiving complaints and providing information. The manager of Ampla [the company] affirmed that salaries were delayed by four months in the contract with DMTU, which was confirmed by a DMTU manager. In this period, Ampla delayed the salary of the employees. With the delay this month, the employees stopped working, going against the order of the manager of Ampla to avoid harm to the population (SAG-DIEESE, 2001).

In 2010, employees in cleaning and conservation in Campinas also protested against delays in salaries:

On 10/05 the strike began. On 11/05, around 300 *women employees* – contracted to clean municipal schools and childcare facilities – demonstrated in front of the Palácio dos Jequitibás [City Hall]. On 13/05 the conflict appeared to come to a conclusion: the company paid half the employees. Many checks, however, bounced. [...] an administrative process to rescind the contract with the company commenced, and for this, the values could be used to pay fines, with the credit of the service provider blocked. On 18/05, the cleaners received word that they would be fired. The municipality believes that a new company would be contracted for cleaning services and would readmit the cleaners. But it was clarified that this would be a decision of the company (SAG-DIEESE, 2010, our emphasis).

## 6. Final Considerations

A look at the totality of data from the SAG-DIEESE database makes it clear that the major preoccupation of Brazilian strike movements revolves around remuneration of workers. The struggle for better salaries is present in 52% of the stoppages and considering the wider group of economic demands composed by salary adjustment, indirect salaries and benefits, etc., the percentage rises to 78% (SAG-DIEESE, 2012).

Questions related specifically to women workers are present in only one percent of the total number of strikes and are linked in particular to questions of maternity. The

concentration of demands around childcare issues consisted of around 80% of the causes of women's strikes. This situation leads us to believe that strike movements are preoccupied primarily in bettering those working conditions linked to women's traditional familial role. Initiatives demanding equal pay between men and women, minimum numbers of job posts for women or anti-discrimination actions only amount to three percent of women's strikes.

Taking into account the legal conjuncture of the epoch of each strike, we observed that stoppages increased after legal conquests through the struggle to enforce recently acquired rights or to widen those already won. In the ambit of the strikes studied, therefore, it is possible to say that the union movement showed itself to be more reactive than proactive.

Looking at the causes related to the question of gender in contrast to the wider group of motives for strikes, we observe that there was not one strike conducted exclusively for causes related to women's interests. Moreover, despite the fact the space that women have occupied in the larger group of strikes has amplified in the last years, it is still variable and quite modest. The average of the last five years studied (2007 to 2011) shows that women's strikes were just three percent of the total number of strikes.

These observations indicate that there was not an organized and focused action in the struggle for gender equity, capable of significantly influencing the wider group of strikes in Brazil during the period studied.



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<<http://portal.mte.gov.br/imprensa/auxilio-creche-um-direito-da-trabalhadora.htm>>.

Previdência Social (Social Assistance):  
<<http://www.previdencia.gov.br/conteudoDinamico.php?id=24>>.

Receita Federal (Federal Revenue):  
<<http://www.receita.fazenda.gov.br/pessoajuridica/empresacidada/default.htm>>.

## Appendix I

### Table of Thematic Groups, 1983-2011, Brazil

Assunto	Quinquênios						TOTAL
	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2011	
<b>Equidade de Condições</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>3</b>		<b>10</b>
Cotas para mulheres	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Discriminação por gênero	1	-	-	-	2	-	3
Igualdade de remuneração	5	1	-	-	-	-	6
<b>Condições de Trabalho da Mulher</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>
Alojamento feminino	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Assédio moral	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Assédio sexual	-	-	3	-	-	-	3
Atraso de salário	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Melhores condições de trabalho para mulheres	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
Plano de cargos e salários	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Plano de saúde	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Prevenção de assédio moral e sexual	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Punição de mulheres	4	1	3	-	-	-	8
Revistas femininas	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
Segurança no trabalho	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
<b>Gestação</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>
Estabilidade gestante	10	3	-	1	-	-	14
Licença-aborto	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Melhores condições de trabalho para gestantes	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Punição de gestantes	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Readmissão gestantes	1	3	1	1	1	-	7
Teste de gravidez	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
<b>Cuidados com os filhos(as)</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>219</b>
Abono de falta para acompanhamento de filho(a)	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Auxílio-creche	4	30	23	16	18	28	119
Auxílio-maternidade/natalidade	-	1	1	-	3	-	5
Bolsa de estudos para filhos	1	-	-	2	-	-	3
Creche	26	22	5	2	1	2	58
Licença-maternidade	2	1	1	-	2	23	29
Pagamento de adicionais/benefícios durante a licença-maternidade	-	-	-	1	3	-	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>279</b>

[Themes, Five-Year Periods

### Equality of Conditions

Quotas for Women

Gender Discrimination

Equal Remuneration

### Working Conditions of Women Workers

Female Accommodations

Moral Harassment

Sexual Harassment

Salary Delay

Better Working Conditions for Women Workers

Career Plans for Occupations and Salaries

Health Plan

Prevention of Moral and Sexual Harassment

Punishment of Women

Personal Inspection

Personal Safety in the Workplace

### **Pregnancy**

Stability of the Pregnant Worker

Leave for Miscarriage

Better Working Conditions for Pregnant Workers

Punishment of Pregnant Workers

Readmission of Pregnant Workers

Pregnancy Test

### **Childcare**

Bonus to Accompany Children

Childcare Benefit

Childcare/Maternity Aid

Scholarships for Children

Childcare Facilities

Maternity Leave

Payment of Extra Benefits during Maternity Leave]